

[Copyleft and "unpublishing" content for the public good](#)

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Something I am still trying to get my head around is the idea of copylefting, and in particular the [GNU Public License](#). The idea is so far out of the mainstream, but also very appealing to me: Instead of trying to carefully retain all intellectual property on an idea or an intellectual work in order to make money, one can instead give the ideas away for free, to all (free as in freedom, not just free stuff), and others can use that freedom to make your idea better. What surprises me even more, is that many of the larger open source projects have not only done this, but they've even figured out how to make money while giving everything they make away for free.

But the real question is, can copylefting be achieved in non-computer areas? Could it be possible, for example, to "unpublish" a book under the GNU License, or "unpatent" a technology? What would the world look like if a significant fraction of our published works and technologies were free in the sense that anyone could see the source material, and then use it however they saw fit? I know that to most of the professors and industry professionals I know, such an idea would be contrary to research as we understand it.

However, I do believe that copylefting and "unpublishing" will make their way from computing and digital information into the publishing and research worlds, and in some respects it's already started. In the publishing world, much-feared internet pirates are turning the idea of publishing profitably on its head, and a few authors and directors have [figured out how to turn piracy into a positive for their work](#). In the research world, the fledgling [HackerSpaces and MakerSpaces](#) are now turning many people on to carrying out small research projects, and are spinning off quite a number of entrepreneurial ventures. That said, what we haven't seen yet are whether these open science spaces will one day lead to a growth in unpatenting.

Once again, I'm still trying to get my head around what the world would look like should our current method of "black box IP" give way to open ideas. What I do know, however, is that the goal for this site is to host just such a transformation. Though we are in our infancy right now, there are already a couple of collaborations taking place, in which I developed an Excel sheet calculator which was then taken by another user and implemented into his project, and I would say that with time, these projects will become advanced enough to be comparable with professional counterparts. It's a slow process, but much like how Open Source revolutionized computing over the last decade, I think we are due in for more such revolutions, and here at LaboratoryMike we want to be a part of the next one.